POLICY BRIEF

InterAgency Institute
BEYOND INSTITUTIONAL BOUNDARIES

CYBERDETERRENCE AS POLICY FOR DEMOCRACY DEFENSE

Author: Leonardo Perin Vichi

POLICY STATEMENT

PsyOps aiming attack opponents through misinformation are recurring activities which records can be found since ancient history. Nevertheless, misinformation activities in cyber domain brought new dynamics and methods to this kind of operations. Dealing with governmental misinformation is an ability journalists learn still in the first years in university; however, it has been often detected complex misinformation strategies being used as offensive approaches on strategic communication, aiming undermining and weaken democratic infrastructure in many countries. Two strategies are more recurring: attacks against election process and the spreading of fake news whose impact provoke discredit to State institutions. Deterrence policies against the spread of misinformation are nowadays urgently necessary to safekeep critical democratic infrastructure of the States.

BACKGROUND

"*Every government lies. Here and everywhere*" (1). Information produced by governments and political institutions of governmental or party bias has as priority its own interests and agendas. Howsoever, is a big risk for communication operators, like journalists, to be tangled by first-hand information offered by official government channels and consequently to reverberate information that are not totally correct or even completely false (2).

Journalists are prepared to deal with this kind of behavior that information presents during the verification process of news involving government actors. But, public opinion on Information Era is dealing with a high volume of information that proceeds from uneven sources, which reputation and credibility are questionable. So, a strategy used to pre-format this panorama was the constant and recurring attacks against press institutions, denouncing hypothetical partiality of press and of journalists.

Nowadays, institutions like the press, law system, science and the university are in the center of a wave of attack whose goals are to destabilize democratic infrastructures. If not long time ago such activities could be detected only near election period, now they acquired a level of continuity with no precedents. Groups of interest, whether parties, state actors, infrastate actors or even non-state actors started acting in a coordinated and uninterrupted way, promoting a permanent state of spreading of misinformation and seeking materialize their own agendas and goals despite public interest and the welfare state. Its battlefield has been primarily social medias.

FINDINDS

During War, truth is always the first to die. A remarkable case of the use of strategic communication tactics with political goals in the cyberspace happened in Mexico in the middle 1990s, by means of methods employed by Zapatist Army of National Liberation, that wanted to create external pression against Mexican government in order to get its objectives (3). The beginning of the 2000s have seen the proliferation of a vast series of alternative means of communication, creating such relativism that truth was now being guided by an epistemological chaos, becoming a question of framework and political agenda (4).

From netwars of cyber-militancy groups, the cybernetic panorama was occupied since then by actors whose objectives mixed economic, political and hybrid interests, with actors that either wanted create engagement to their platforms aiming profit through paid advertising or state-actors interested in interfering on the organization of competitor/adversary countries. Well-known cases in which such actors were detected, even when attribution of its actual goals is a tough task, were Brexit and Catalan Referendum and EUA, France, Germany, Italy and Brazil elections in the last years of the 2010s.

More recently, EUA, Brazil and Italy dealt with challenging figures as Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro and Matteo Salvini. All of them had in their backstage a same mentor: Steve Bannon (5). Their methods are always the same — using state structure not to throw stones on windows, but to implode the system from within. The resulting can already be detected in the high political instability seen in these countries. Such instability certainly will be felt for a very long time.

CONCLUSIONS

The reliability of democratic system is an indispensable condition to define the status of a country in a vast gamut of areas. From the economic view, a country whose democracy is constantly being put at the stake, does not offer necessary conditions to be seen with interest by investors or companies wishing to stablish subsidiaries there. From the social view, disturbance created by misinformation against democratic infrastructure weakens institutions and undermine people reliability. Impacts on political and international areas are undeniable, provoking strong suspicion on the stability of the whole country.

SUGGESTIONS

- Advances in legal system seeking prevent spreading of fake news must be considered as elements of utmost importance to create deterrence against misinformation operations in cyberspace that has as target democratic critical infrastructures of States.
- Therewithal, interagency cooperation, specially between public institution such as Public Ministries, attorneyships, security and homeland agencies and polices, and fact checking agencies is a relevant development to identifying perpetrators of fake news in social medias, especially those propagated by the use of robots.
- Finally, academy needs to think, in the field of Digital Humanities, policies to dissuade the spreading of misinformation by general population, strengthening consolidated information medias and weakening recurring misinformation channels.

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